

Sherman, William Tecumseh

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The son of a judge, "Cump" Sherman was 9 years old when his father died, and he was adopted by Thomas Ewing, an influential Missouri politician whose daughter he subsequently married. Although wild and undisciplined, the red-haired Sherman graduated sixth in his class at West Point in 1840. As a staff officer in California during the Mexican War he won a brevet for meritorious service, but he resigned from the army in 1853 and worked successively as a bank representative in San Francisco, a lawyer in Leavenworth, Kans., the superintendent of a military academy at Pineville, La. (later Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge), and the president of a trolley company in St. Louis, Mo.

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Never a great battle captain, Sherman, in command of a division in Ulysses S. GRANT's army at the Battle of SHILOH (April 1862), was surprised and almost defeated by a fierce Confederate attack launched by Albert Sidney JOHNSTON. Nor was Sherman more successful when his preliminary advances from the north against the great Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg, Miss., were repelled at Chickasaw Bayou. Under John A. MCCLERNAND, however, Sherman played an important role in the seizure of Arkansas Post, and later assisted Grant in the capture of Vicksburg in July 1863 (see VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN). At the Battle of CHATTANOOGA in November 1863, Sherman's assaults at Tunnel Hill were repulsed, but the Union forces still won the engagement.

When Grant became general in chief, Sherman commanded the large Union army of approximately 100,000 men that moved southeast from Dalton, Ga. Although roundly defeated in rash attacks at Kenesaw Mountain, he captured Atlanta in September 1864 after a long series of cat-and-mouse contests with Joseph E. JOHNSTON (see ATLANTA CAMPAIGN). An aggressive leader, Sherman was expert in planning and executing long marches and in mastering difficult logistical problems. Spreading out his army about 80 km (50 mi) wide, he conducted a scorched-earth campaign against the Confederacy, ravaging the unprotected Georgia countryside in the famous March to the Sea (Nov. 16-Dec. 22, 1864) that resulted in the capture of Savannah. Agreeing that "War is hell," he nonetheless used the same pillaging tactics in striking northward through the Carolinas in early 1865, and his campaign, after a Union victory at Bentonville, compelled Johnston to surrender at Durham Station, N.C., in April.

In 1869, Sherman was advanced to full general and succeeded Grant as general in chief of the army, a post he held until 1883. His two-volume personal memoirs (1875; repr. 1984) are among the keenest, most penetrating and intellectual of the reminiscences by prominent Civil War soldiers. Sherman established (1881) the world-famous school at Fort Leavenworth, Kans., that became known as the Command and General Staff College. He retired from the army in 1884 and, although he consented to a great many speaking engagements, declined all offers of high political office, saying: "I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected."

Warren W. Hassler, Jr.

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